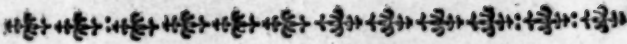


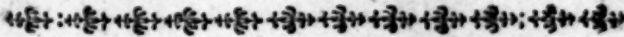
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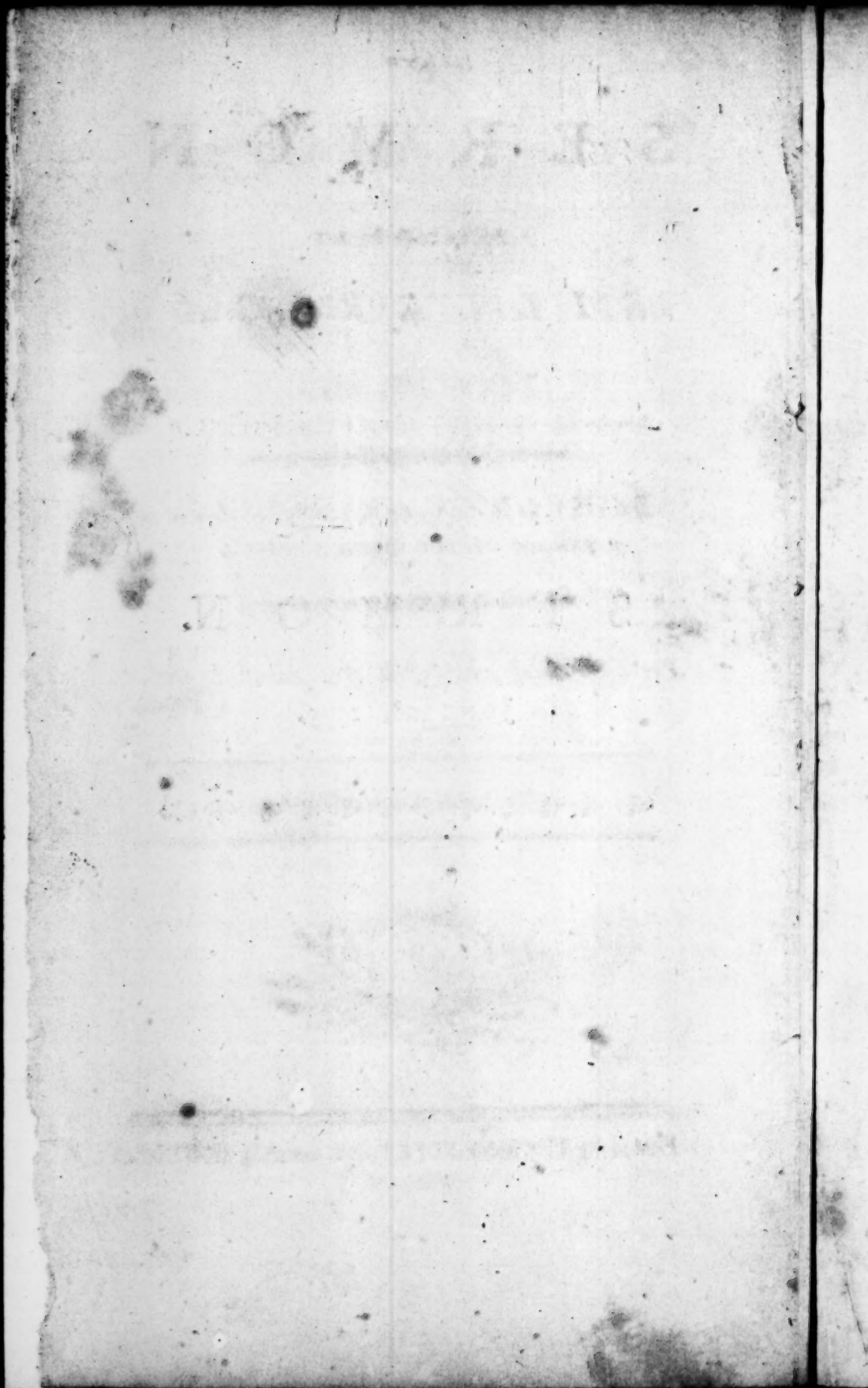


Mr. CUMINGS's

S E R M O N.

JUNE 28, 1795.





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S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

B I L L E R I C A,

JUNE 28, 1795.

By HENRY CUMINGS, A.M.
PASTOR OF THE CHURCH THERE. K.

Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.
PAUL,

PUBLISHED BY DESIRE.



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S. B. R. M. O. N.

THE

BY HENRY J. R. M. O. N.

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THE



ROMANS II. 14, 15.

“WHEN THE GENTILES, WHICH HAVE NOT THE LAW,
DO BY NATURE THE THINGS CONTAINED IN THE
LAW, THESE HAVING NOT THE LAW, ARE A LAW
UNTO THEMSELVES ;

WHICH SHEW THE WORK OF THE LAW WRITTEN
IN THEIR HEARTS, THEIR CONSCIENCE BEARING
WITNESS, AND THEIR THOUGHTS THE MEAN WHILE
ACCUSING OR ELSE EXCUSING ONE ANOTHER.”

AS God hath imprinted the law of recti-
tude upon the hearts and consciences
of men, and bound it up, as it were, with their reason
and understanding ; and as he hath sent his Son into
the world to promote and enforce the practice of it,
by his example, instructions, and the frequent in-
culcation of the doctrine of future recompences ;
it is unquestionably an important part of the duty
of a christian minister, to call the attention of his
hearers to this law, and, if possible, to persuade
and excite them to order their lives and actions in
conformity to its precepts and requirements.

AND

AND when infidelity prevails, and doctrines are advanced and propagated, which destroy all moral difference between the actions of rational creatures, and tare up by the roots all religion, both natural and revealed, it behoves the friends of piety and virtue, especially those whose office obliges them to defend the cause of righteousness and true holiness, to stand forth and contend earnestly for the essential doctrines and fundamental duties of religion and rectitude, that, as far as in them lies, they may check that growing licentiousness of principle and consequent dissoluteness of morals, which conduce directly to the misery and wretchedness of mankind, and may also, at the same time, engage men in such pursuits, as shall serve, at once, to promote their peace on earth, and forward their preparation for glory, honour, and immortal happiness, in the heavenly world.

I SHALL therefore make no apology for the choice of a text which leads me to discourse on those principles of religion and morality, which have their foundation in the constitution and frame of our nature, and to enforce the obligations thereof, in opposition to all the votaries of impiety, whether infidels, sceptics or libertines, who treat all religion and moral obligation, as the fictions or reveries of a deluded imagination. The only favour I request of my hearers, is, that while I apply and appeal to reason and common sense, every one would judge and decide as becometh a rational creature and moral agent, who hath an important interest depending.

By the *law written on men's hearts*, (between which and God's revealed law, our text teaches us to distinguish) is undoubtedly meant, that sense of duty and obligation, which the light of nature impresses

presses on the mind, and which serves as a guide and directory to those, who are destitute of the glorious light of revelation. And if we attend to our moral feelings, and the most obvious dictates of reason, we shall be satisfied, that though revelation, in several instances, gives us clearer and more enlarged views of truth and duty, yet the light of nature instructs us in many truths of importance, and teaches our duty in many points of most interesting concernment.

It is indeed impossible for us to determine, with any degree of precision, how far a man would or might, by the light of nature alone, extend his discoveries respecting a Deity, an overruling providence and future state, or respecting the duties and obligations of religion and morality, supposing him secluded from the rest of his species and brought up in solitude. Neither are we able to say how far men would be capable of extending their knowledge in reference to such points, even under all the advantages of society and a free communication of thoughts on all subjects, supposing them to be at the same time, without any auxiliary ray of light from revelation, either immediate or traditionary. We have no examples sufficient to enable us to decide absolutely in either of these cases. Were we left to the sole guidance of unassisted nature, there are probably some truths respecting God, his perfections and government, and our destination for a future state, about which we should remain in great darkness and ignorance, after the best improvement of our faculties; which yet, reason, arguing upon the stock of her own principles, can establish and confirm, as soon as they are suggested or brought into view by revelation. It cannot however be denied, that there are many moral truths so obvious,
that

that they command the notice and attention of the intellectual eye, as soon as it is opened to discern its proper objects; they being so deeply inscribed on the hearts of men, that they will admit a pertinent application of CICERO's words, when speaking of the law of self-preservation, which translated into english, are, as follows. "We have not been taught them by the learned, we have not received them from our ancestors, we have not taken them from books; but they are derived from and forced upon us by nature, and stamped in characters indelible on our very frame; they were not conveyed to us by instruction, but wrought into our very constitution; they were not the dictate of education, but of instinct."

AND whereas the text, not only supposes a distinction between the law of God *written on the heart* and his revealed law; but also plainly intimates that the former, so far as it extends, corresponds with the latter; it may not be impertinent to state, in a few words, both the difference between them, and their coincidence; or to shew how they are to be distinguished, and how they are connected and coincide with each other.

THE law of nature inscribed on the human heart, or natural religion (as it is commonly called) is pure theism, detached from the peculiarities of the jewish and christian systems, and results from the relation between God and his creatures, and between one creature and another. It comprehends whatsoever our reason, unaided by extraordinary light, can, by contemplating our own make, dependencies and connections, and the constitution of the world around us, discover or perceive to be fit and suitable, in regard to our internal affections and outward

ward demeanor towards God and one another, and also in reference to the government of our own appetites and passions.

THE law of God revealed, or revealed religion, is owing to more immediate divine instructions or supernatural communications from the *Father of lights*. This revealed law of God, is designed to give influential weight to the law of nature, by removing uncertainties and solving doubts, in regard to some matters of great concernment, and enforcing the prosecution of our duty and interest, of which it gives us the most enlightened and extensive views, by arguments and motives the most powerful, that can possibly be laid before the human mind.

It is natural here to observe, that revelation does not contradict or oppose reason, but irradiates, improves and enlarges it. Revelation presupposes our obligation to attend, and requires us to attend to the light and plain dictates of reason, and owes it admission to such attention. Let me add, that as revelation embraces and enforces with peculiar sanctions, the principles and duties, and supplies the deficiencies of natural religion; so natural religion embraces and adopts for it's own, the most essential parts of revelation, as soon as they are exhibited to view with sufficient evidence; they being agreeable to the faculties of our nature and congruous to our hopes and moral feelings. For such is the harmonious coincidence of natural religion and revealed, that every doctrine or truth pertaining to divinity or morals, which corresponds with our internal perceptions and reasonable expectations, or which, from its obvious suitableness to our make and constitution, and conformity to our conception of rectitude, commands the assent and approbation
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of reason, and impresses a sense of obligation, altho' the knowledge of it were first communicated to the mind by supernatural illumination, does yet, as soon as known, incorporate itself with the law of God *written on the heart*, so as to become an important part of that law.

SOME affect to doubt, whether all religion be not a mere creature of deluded fancy, without any foundation in truth and reality. But whoever will contemplate himself, will soon obtain satisfaction on this question, and be convinced, that religion, far from being an imaginary illusion, is founded upon the firm basis of reason, and hath an inseparable connection with our rational nature. For as the most important truths lie near us, and are so open to inspection, that we have no occasion to enter into abstruse speculations for the investigation of them; so it is with religion. A critical view of our own constitution will convince us, that a man may with as much propriety, be called a religious, as rational creature; religious affection, a propensity to worship, or inclination and tendency of soul to fly to some superior being, to some invisible power for support and help, in time of need, being as natural to him as the reasoning faculty.

IN order therefore to satisfy ourselves, whether religion be a reality or only an imaginary phantom, we need only to enter into ourselves, and examine our own experience, internal feelings and perceptions. Upon such examination we shall find, that we are, in a proper sense, *a law to ourselves*, the law of religion and morality being inwrought into our constitution, inscribed upon our consciences, and interwoven with our reason.

IN

IN order to a competent knowledge of this law, it is not necessary that we first revolve the historic page, traverse the globe, and acquaint ourselves with the opinions, manners and customs of ancient and distant nations; neither are we left to trace it out by the slow deductions of reason; nor obliged to puzzle our minds with subtil and metaphysical enquiries into the abstract natures and relations of things, before we can discover it. We need not ascend to heaven to bring it down from above, nor descend into the deep to seek for it there. For it is a principle ever active in the mind and engraven on the souls of men, in such fair and conspicuous characters, as can scarcely escape the notice of the most careless and superficial eye.

It may be presumed, that every man of common sense, who, after consulting the volume of his own nature, will honestly declare his experience and speak his real sentiments, will not hesitate to acknowledge, that, without any laboured reasoning about the matter, he clearly perceives and feels an essential difference, between piety and irreligion, virtue and vice. For there are certain qualities and actions, so evidently right and fit, that, at first view, they command the approbation and applause of the mind, and are always accompanied with the secret gratulation and euge of the heart. There are others, which, on the contrary, as soon as they are discerned, the mind cannot but condemn and reprobate, as wrong and unbecoming, and which are always unavoidably attended with inward censure and self-reproach.

THE moral fitnesses of things are not indeed, in all cases, self-evident. In some intricate cases, it may be very difficult to decide and pronounce concerning them. In others, that are very clear in themselves,

themselves, men's judgments may be so perverted by the blinding influence of some corrupt affection, or bias, as to form very erroneous conclusions. Nevertheless there are some things so plain, that a man, in the exercise of sober reason, cannot, without belying his own conscience, and fortifying his mind against the glare of intuitive evidence, deny them to be more fit than their opposites. Whoever shall say and insist upon it, that friendship and beneficence are the same, in a moral estimation, with malice and cruelty; or that every man has a right to plunder and murder, whom he pleases; or that no one is obliged to keep faith or perform compacts, with his fellow creatures, or to pay any reverence or homage to the Deity; whoever shall make such assertions as these, will be universally considered, as either void of reason, or else as acting the hypocrite, contrary to the convictions of his own mind, in order to promote some base and wicked design.

ALTHOUGH, in some few instances, especially when under the biases of different prejudices and interests, men may entertain different opinions concerning fitness and propriety of conduct; yet there is evidently belonging to human nature such an indelible sense of right and wrong, and such a quick discernment of beauty and deformity, that, by all classes of people, he would be accounted an Heteroclit in the moral world (if such an one could be found) who, in the exercise of reason, should view, with equal indifference, approbation or censure, or be in the same manner affected towards two opposite characters; of one whereof, the distinguishing features and qualities were piety, benevolence, friendship, justice, fidelity, and universal active philanthropy; and of the other, atheism, malevolence, unrighteousness, unfaithfulness, and a cruel disposition ever active to promote misery and wretchedness among men.

• If religion and moral rectitude be mere creatures of imagination, without any foundation in reality, the consequence is unavoidable, that our constitution is a lie, and our clearest perceptions nothing else but deceitful illusions of fancy, upon which no rational dependance can be placed. But whoever can believe this, must be possessed of a very singular and extraordinary kind of faith, capable of supporting itself, not barely without evidence, but in opposition to evidence the brightest that can possibly be offered to the mind of man. For if all reasoning from experience and mental sentiment, or from feelings, that are owing to the frame of our nature, be fallacious, we can be certain of nothing, not even of our own existence; for we may as well doubt whether we have a being, as whether that internal sense or perception, which points out a moral difference in actions, be founded in truth, or be only a false and delusive impression.

SHOULD it be said, that our moral feelings, do not arise from the constitution of our nature, but are owing wholly to education, it may be answered, that with equal reason, it may be asserted, that a taste for music is not at all owing to the structure of the ear, but solely to use and habit. Our moral discernment may indeed be greatly strengthened and improved by a good education; but it cannot be eradicated or destroyed, except perhaps in some rare instances, by a bad one.

It is not pretended that religion was born with us; neither can this be truly said of reason. But as the principles of reason were given us with our being, by which gift or endowment, we become capable of wisdom, knowledge and intellectual improvement, as soon as our faculties attain to sufficient maturity
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for exercise ; so the seeds of religion, being originally implanted in human nature ; do, as soon as rational agency takes place, spring up, and make a visible appearance, though in various forms, according to diversity in cultivation, or difference in circumstances.

WHATEVER therefore we may think of innate notions and ideas, it cannot be denied, that the mind of man is so formed, as easily to receive the impressions of a Deity, from the smallest notices, and readily to perceive and feel a difference between moral beauty and deformity. Religion and virtue being consentaneous to the human mind, and suited to it's faculties, need only to be displayed in a true light, in order to produce conviction and approbation. The leading principles and duties thereof, being interwoven with the faculties of our nature, carry such evidence with them, that as soon as they are offered to view, reason will embrace them, unless it be greatly neglected or abused.

THERE is indeed a great difference between truths, in point of clearness, perspicuity and evidence. Some carry conviction in their very face, and command assent as soon as they occur to view. Others depend on a train of reasoning for their support, and are to be proved by argument. Mathematical subjects admit of mathematical demonstration, which is the highest degree of proof, of which any proposition is capable. Moral subjects stand on moral evidence, which yet may be, and is in fact in many cases, so circumstanced, as to afford as full satisfaction to the mind, as the strictest mathematical demonstration. This is the case in regard to the most essential and fundamental principles of religion and morality, of the truth whereof, the mind, by a little exercise
of

of it's discerning faculties, may attain to such satisfactory certainty, as shall exclude doubt, and be fully competent as a motive to correspondent action.

NEXT to our own existence, there is nothing more evident, than the existence of some supreme and invisible Being, upon whom we and all things are dependent. This is a truth wrote, as it were, with a sun-beam, upon the face of universal nature ; taught by our own constitution ; proclaimed by the magnificent scenery of the heavens, by the beauty and order of the system, by the uniform regularity observable in the production of all things ; and, in short confirmed, by every event and occurrence, that takes place in the world. Yea, it is a truth, which our own existence, and the existence of every finite being, does, with irresistable evidence force upon the mind. For as it would be the greatest absurdity imaginable to suppose that any being could originate it's own existence, so we are constrained to believe that there is some self-existent and eternal Being, to whom we and all finite natures are indebted for existence and preservation ; and who consequently possesses in the highest perfection, every excellence, which can be found, in any degree, among the various orders of beings throughout the universal system of creation.

It is indeed one of the clearest dictates of reason, that the eternal and original cause of all things, whose word gave nature birth, and whose will gives law to the universe, must be infinite in understanding and power, and sufficient for his own happiness ; and consequently, holy, just and good, and compleat in every moral excellence ; there being no possible cause or motive, that can operate on such a nature, to produce, in any instance, the least deviation from reason, rectitude and benevolence.

THE

THE existence of a God is so evident, that it is presupposed and taken for granted in all forms and institutions of religious service, as a principle that will not be disputed or controverted by any. For since all religion has respect to a Deity, it is manifest, that there can be no religion or religious obligation, if there be no God; and consequently no substantial basis of morality.

To attempt to prove the being of a God from revelation, is to take the thing for granted in the medium of proof. For we must first believe there is a God, before we can believe any declaration, as coming from him. Let it also be observed, that in order to our depending on any revelation, we must assume it for truth, that God, the revealer, is both incapable of being himself deceived and of deceiving his creatures, or that he is possessed of an unerring understanding, in connection with inviolable veracity and perfect rectitude. For if we suppose him liable to error or deficient in any moral excellence; especially, if we suppose him capable of duplicity and prevarication (I speak with awe) or that his agency is concerned as the proper efficient cause of all immorality, not excepting the grossest instances of lying and falsehood; we can never be certain of the truth of any doctrine, on the authority of the most express and authentic revelation.

WITH the belief of the existence of a Deity is very closely connected an impression of his providential and moral government. Of this our very fears are a strong evidence. That general awe and dread of some supreme power, which prevails among mankind, instead of being the cause of the belief of a governing Deity, is much better accounted for by considering it as the effect of such an antecedent persuasion. Were we to conceive of God as unconcerned

cerned with the government of the world, or as standing at the head of the creation only as an indifferent spectator of the conduct and circumstances of his creatures, our belief of his existence would give us no encouragement to hope for any thing from his goodness, neither would the contemplation of his majesty and power make us afraid.

OF this doctrine of God's providential agency in supporting and governing the world, which is suggested by our fears, the mind cannot but receive very strong conviction, whenever it contemplates his nature and attributes, and attentively considers the constitution of the world, the indigent and dependent state of all creatures in it, and the provision made for the supply of their wants, by the concurrence of causes absolutely out of their reach.

If we believe that the world was created by God, a being of infinite power and goodness, wisdom and rectitude, it is hardly possible to withhold our assent from the doctrine of his providential government, or not to believe, that by his all-animating presence, he pervades, supports, sustains, connects and regulates the whole frame of nature, ordering the circumstances of all creatures, and, in a special manner, superintending the affairs of the intellectual and moral system. There is nothing in this doctrine contrariant to reason, or inconsistent with our natural notions of an all-perfect Deity. On the contrary, the doctrine is perfectly consonant to our natural sense and apprehension of things. For we feel our insufficiency and dependence, and know that for life and every enjoyment we are beholden to causes above our controul. And we are taught, by reason and philosophy, to trace every dependent cause up to the great first Cause, to whom all subordinate agents and

causes, and all the laws and powers of nature owe their being and support, and to whose superintendence and sovereign direction, they are continually subject, in all their operations.

In reproach of this doctrine of God's universal sustaining power and all-governing providence, some have inferred from it, that sin is of divine original, or owing to the agency of God, as it's primary efficient cause. It will be no easy matter to defend this doctrine, nor will it answer any good purpose to attempt to defend it, if it doth really terminate in a conclusion so absurd, and so shocking to all piety, as the divine original of sin. Such a conclusion robs God of holiness, it being a direct contradiction to say, that holiness is an essential perfection of the divine nature, and, at the same time, to assert, that God, by his creative will and energy, is the cause of all unholiness.

To avoid a conclusion from God's universal government so derogatory to, and inconsistent with his holy character, we are obliged to make a distinction between his positive and permissive will. If there be sin in the world, it must have taken place under divine permission, supposing (which it is presumed will not be denied) that God could have prevented it, by the interposal of his omnipotence. But why he should permit such an evil thing to take place, as he is of purer eyes than to behold without abhorrence, is a question too high for us to solve, being one of the unsearchable mysteries of his government. We may venture however to assert, that if God be perfectly holy, sin cannot be owing to his positive influence or agency, unless we remove all moral turpitude from it, and consider it as something right and fit in it's nature. But if, rejecting the
common

common notion, we exclude moral turpitude from our idea of sin, and rank it among the works of God, which are all very good, no one need be solicitous about the doctrine of future punishments. For if sin doth really flow from God, as it should cause, and be properly the work of his power, which is never employed but in conformity to reason and rectitude, it must be free from moral deformity, and an object of his complacence, and cannot consequently expose any one to the damnation of hell.

IF therefore we would defend the doctrine of God's all-sustaining and all-governing providence against the charge of impiety and licentiousness, we must guard it against the impious consequence of his positive agency in the production of sin, by keeping in view the important distinction above-mentioned, between his real influence or efficiency, and permissive will. For if, rejecting this distinction, we ascribe all the volitions and actions of creatures, to the positive operation of the Deity, as their proper efficient cause, we shall destroy all moral difference between piety and impiety, virtue and vice, by placing them upon a footing, which will set them on a par, in a moral estimation.—But to return from this digression, if you please to call it so.

WHEN we contemplate the Deity, as the supreme Ruler and Governor of the world, and attend to his essential perfections, our minds must be involved in shades of impenetrable darkness, if we do not immediately perceive, that he is intitled to our inward reverence and esteem, and external worship, and also feel an obligation to cultivate those devout regards, and engage in those services of love and obedience, which his sovereign dominion, august attributes, and supreme moral excellencies demand.

WHEN

WHEN we consider also, that we are the creatures of such a great and glorious Creator, and amenable subjects of his moral kingdom ; and, at the same time, take a survey of our nature and circumstances, of our powers, capacities, dependencies and connections, and attend also to the consequences, both in respect to ourselves and others, that will result from our conduct, according to the quality of our actions ; when we turn our thoughts on these things, we cannot but see and know, that besides immediate acts of homage and worship, there are other duties, of importance and necessity for promoting the end and design of our creation, and procuring for us an happiness adequate to our faculties ; such as the curbing our appetites with temperance, and our passions with moderation ; a careful adherence to truth and fidelity, justice and righteousness ; together with a reciprocal interchange of friendly and kind offices, in our social and civil intercourse one with another ; in opposition to every base contaminating indulgence, to all fraud, deceit, treachery, injustice, envy, malice, and injurious cruel treatment of each other ; all which things, the mind, as soon as it adverts to them, cannot but reprobate and condemn, as a shameful stoop beneath the dignity of human nature, and incompatible with it's honour and happiness.

SHOULD it now be enquired wherefore we are obliged to apply ourselves to the practice of piety, virtue and benevolence, in the instances above suggested, and to avoid every thing, both in temper and practice, opposite thereto ? Or, in short, what is the ground of obligation, in reference to any instance, of moral conduct ? It will be necessary for the solution of this question, to consider the consequences, which, according to the nature and constitution

tution of things, are connected with those actions or forbearancies, which are the proper objects of choice, and with which we stand chargeable as free agents.

THE will of God is perfect rectitude, being under the guidance and direction of infinite and unerring wisdom. This, therefore, so far as it is known, either by the light of nature or revelation, is an infallible criterion of right and wrong. And to this it behoves us, at all times, to pay a sacred regard, in our lives and actions. But why? The answer is obvious: Because consequences, very important to ourselves and others, will follow from a conformity to or violation of it.

THE moral law, whether we find it in the volumes of nature or revelation, or in both, is the will of God, as it respects the conduct of moral agents. And in order to an acquaintance with the sanctions and enforcements of this law, which are designed to secure obedience to it, and are the foundation of obligation, we must trace actions into their effects, and examine their tendency, according to the constitution of things, to promote happiness or misery. For if all consequences, both near and remote, of doing an action, would be precisely the same with those attending the omission of it; or, in other words, if there would be no difference, in respect to consequences, between doing and avoiding, it will be difficult to shew that such an action can be a duty, or to lay before the mind any motive, of sufficient prevalence to engage a careful attention to it.

To say that an action is right, fit, agreeable to truth, commanded by God, and therefore obligatory, leads to these further enquiries, Why is it right and fit?

fit? How is it agreeable to truth? And wherefore commanded by God? To which the answer must be, because it is suitable to our constitution, dependencies and connections, well adapted to promote the dignity and happiness of our natures, and to answer the benevolent purposes of our creation, in respect both to ourselves and to others, so far as their interest is involved with ours, or affected by our conduct.

THE great Creator and Governor of the universe, in the constitution of the world, hath evidently adjusted one thing to another, in such a manner, that wherever we turn our eyes, we observe an admirable correspondence, and conspiring tendency of the several parts, to advance the good of the whole. This is as observable in the constitution of his moral kingdom, as in the material system; insomuch, that if every moral agent would act up to the dignity, and conform to the law of his nature, he would at once promote his own happiness and that of others; in which case, beauty, harmony, joy and felicity would reign, and prevail through the moral world, and every individual would be blessed.

CONFUSION, misery and wretchedness, are manifestly owing to a departure from that line of rectitude, which is delineated in the fairest traits on the face of the soul, and clearly visible in the constitution of nature. The Author of our being, having formed us for the purposes of virtue and happiness; and it being his will, that we should live up to the dignity of our nature, in which way alone true and adequate happiness can be found; hath, in order, at once, to give us a plain intimation of his will and benevolent intention towards us, and to induce us to comply therewith, connected pain and trouble, of

one

one kind or other, with every instance of improper conduct or opposition to our moral instincts, and made joy and gladness the constant attendants of acting agreeable to the principles of our nature and social connections. This inseparable union, this indissoluble connection, established, by the supreme Ruler, between certain actions and consequent pleasure and satisfaction, or pain and misery, is that which enforces the moral law, impresses a sense of duty, and makes us realize our obligation of obedience.

So that let us found moral obligation on divine authority, on reason and fitness, or on whatever basis we please, we must take in the idea of interest, in order to create an influential sense of it. For an abstract view of things affords no motive to volition, choice or action.

WHEN an action is decent and becoming, suitable to the dignity of our nature, and conformable to our sentiments of beauty, worth and honour, we may be said to be obliged to it in reason; but this amounts to much the same thing, as to say, that we are obliged to it from interest; since uneasiness, or unhappiness, of some kind or other, is the constant inevitable consequence of a conscious violation of the laws of reason, and the rules of honour and decency, without the consideration whereof, it would be impossible to preserve a proper regard for those laws and rules. It is not conceivable how a practical sense of obligation to obey any law or rule can be excited, if it should be conceded that the transgression of such law or rule would be attended with no inconvenience or trouble, with no uneasy sensation or uncomfortable presage.

To

To eradicate from our nature, or totally to suppress the principle of self-love (if it were possible) would shock the very foundation of religion, and overturn the main pillars of morality. For a mind, void of self-love, and consequently in a state of neutrality towards happiness or misery, is incapable of being influenced by any dissuasive from vice or motive to virtue.

The doctrines of a state of retributions beyond death and the grave, and of compleat remission of sins upon repentance, are to be reckoned among the strongest motives to piety and virtue, and most powerful enforcements of obedience to the divine will. The light of nature leads to many considerations calculated to induce a belief of these important doctrines; and to give them some salutary influence on our hopes and fears. It must however be acknowledged, that we are indebted to revelation, for raising them above uncertainty, and confirming our faith into an energetic principle of correspondent action. I would just add, that were they not confirmed by revelation, prudence and wisdom would teach us to act on the supposition of their truth; especially as they are so far from contradicting, that they coincide with reason; because otherwise, without any present advantage, we should put our everlasting interest at a most awful hazard.

AND now, my hearers, from a general survey of what has been discoursed, it is natural to observe, that as God hath written his law upon the hearts of men, and formed human nature with a capacity of perceiving the difference between moral good and evil, in all the most important cases, every man must be inexcusable, who abandons himself to irreligion and tramples the great laws of morality under foot,
since

Since such a conduct must be owing to a wilfully
perverse neglect or abuse of his reason and moral
sense.

Let me also observe, that as the light of nature,
so far as it goes, teaches and inculcates the duties
contained in God's revealed law, and prepares the
way for the reception of revelation, so the friends of
revealed religion need never be alarmed at an appeal
to reason, as if the faith of christians would be en-
dangered thereby. Natural and revealed religion are
evidently connected by the ties of such a close and
important alliance, that a separation would be vastly
injurious to the former, and the utter ruin of the
latter.

THE inquisitive and honest theist, far from con-
tending for the sufficiency of the light of nature,
which leaves him in obscurity in regard to some very
interesting matters, will gratefully accept the aid of
supernatural illumination whenever he can obtain it.
The sincere and judicious christian also, far from ex-
cluding reason from matters of faith, will esteem it
preposterous to attempt to exalt revealed religion on
the ruins of natural, or to require men to believe
without, or contrary to rational evidence. To ex-
clude reason totally from the province of faith, is as
dangerous an error, as it would be, to ascribe such
all-sufficiency to reason, as would supersede the
necessity of revelation.

SHOULD it once be conceded that christianity can-
not be supported by argument, or that our faith in it
has no foundation in rational evidence, we shall yield
the cause to infidels, who could not wish for a greater
occasion of triumph. But if our faith be founded
on evidence, it must appeal to reason, which alone

can decide on the sufficiency of evidence. And if reason be allowed to decide concerning the sufficiency of the evidence, upon which we receive revelation, we cannot consistently refuse to regard it's instructions in reference to the doctrines of received revelation, and the true meaning thereof.

It may not be impertinent to add here, that to ascribe doctrines to any received revelation, inconsistent with our clearest perceptions of truth and rectitude, is a virtual attempt to discard such revelation, as it directly tends to destroy every argument in support of it, by an overballancing counter-evidence.

To renounce religion indeed, either natural or revealed, merely because it contains some things above reason, or of which our reason is not able to form adequate conceptions, would be extreme folly, and an affront to common sense. Should we have recourse to atheism and irreligion, instead of being freed from difficulties of this kind, we should be embarrassed with much greater ones, and be plunged also into absurdities, which it would argue a derangement of our faculties to admit. But reason, though it teaches us to reject absurdities, obliges us to believe some things above the comprehension of our faculties; as for instance, the eternal existence of a Deity. For though eternity be an unfathomable depth, in which the mind is swallowed up and lost, yet, that some being must have existed from eternity, or without beginning, and consequently can never cease to be, we are as certain, as we can be of any mathematical demonstration. This, though above our comprehension, yet, as it involves no absurdity, may be believed, without offering any violence to our understandings. But,

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This doctrine, which teaches that all moral evil flows from the Deity, a Being of infinite perfection and rectitude, as from its original source; or that it is the proper effect of God's constant positive influence and agency, is so great an absurdity, that it will ever be a reproach to our reason to believe it. And whoever shall attempt to establish this tenet by revelation, will cut the bough he stands on; it being impossible to produce any proof of a revelation, greater than the internal evidence, which we constantly carry about in our own breasts, of the falsity of this doctrine.

We believe the sacred scriptures to have been given by inspiration of God; and being firmly persuaded of this unchangeable veracity, we depend upon the truth of the doctrines contained therein. But it must either shock our faith in the veracity of the Deity, or lead us to call in question the divine inspiration of those holy books; if, upon examination, we find that they teach the doctrine of the divine original of all moral evil; and consequently ascribe all deceit, prevarication, falshood and lying, to the efficacious fiat of the Almighty. Upon this hypothesis, how can we be sure, that God did not inspire the writers of the holy scriptures, whether prophets or apostles (if indeed he inspired them at all) with a lying spirit, on purpose to impose on mankind, and lead them into deception and error? If, notwithstanding it is declared to be impossible for God to lie, we can prove from his own word (my spirit trembles at the horrid thought) that he is the father of lies, what dependence can we place on his veracity.

Let it be further observed, that if the positive efficiency of the Deity in the production of all sin, be a doctrine of divine revelation, it cannot consistently

stiently be supposed, that the same revelation is designed to reclaim men from sin, and make them holy. It would be absurd to suppose, that God sent his Son into the world to enlighten and reform mankind, and convert them from sin to holiness, if it be true, that their ignorance, folly and wickedness, are, in every instance, the effects of his choice, and powerful operation; for this would be the same thing, as to suppose that the Son of God was sent into the world, not to *destroy the works of the devil*, but the works of his Father.

Does God counteract himself, and employ his power both to create sin and destroy it? both to make men vicious and wicked, and to form them to holiness and virtue? Are we to suppose, that *the old man, with his deeds, that are corrupt*, is as really and truly the workmanship of God, as *the new man, which is created in righteousness and true holiness*? If this be true, must we not conceive of God, as a being equally pleased with moral good and evil, they being equally the effects of his agency, and his power being equally concerned in the promotion and support of both? But can any one, in the exercise of reason, conceive thus of God; that holy Being, who has assured us, that he is invariably averse to sin and opposed to iniquity; who hath given many awful demonstrations of his utter detestation and abhorrence of moral evil; and who, by the dispensation of the gospel, applies himself to sinners, by arguments and motives, powerfully adapted to excite them to repentance and convert them to holiness? Who can believe, that God, who declares, that he hates and abhors sin, and who makes use of the most alarming threatnings to deter men from it, and of the most alluring promises to engage them in the practice of piety and virtue, is himself the creator of
sin,

sin, and efficient cause of moral evil? He who can believe that such inconsistencies and contrarieties are united in the divine character and conduct, must entertain strange conceptions of the Deity, as if he were alternately under the influence and controul of the two opposite *manichean* principles of good and evil, between which there is a perpetual war and conflict, and employed his power in the cause of sin and holiness, according as one or the other of those principles prevailed or had the ascendancy.

Is this christianity! Does the gospel teach us that sin is the work of God, and also that he hates it, and is determined to punish it with severity? Does our holy religion teach us, that God is so displeased with the effects of his own agency, as to punish his creatures severely for what he hath wrought in them, by the operations of his own power? The honour of the christian religion and of it's divine author, obliges it's friends and advocates, whose own honour is also concerned, to guard it against such an impious construction; a construction subversive of all religion, and inconsistent with every idea of blameworthiness in any man, let his conduct be what it may. For if men's sins be owing to their Maker, or their making, or their fate (all which amount to the same thing) they must be under a delusive impression, if they conceive of themselves as amenable agents, or liable to be called to an account; and freedom, agency and blame, can with no more propriety be predicated of them, than of a piece of clock-work, or any other inanimate machine.

I now refer what has been said for exposing the absurdity and inconsistency of the doctrine of divine efficiency in the production of sin, to your serious consideration;

consideration ; hoping that it will leave such impressions upon the minds of all, that no one, even among the most obstinately impenitent sinners among us, will have the audacious presumption to charge his sin and wickedness upon God, who declares that he would have all come to repentance, that they may be saved.

In conformity to what has been discoursed concerning the principles, duties and obligations of religion and morality, I proceed to observe, that those scoffing libertines, who, under a pretence of free-thinking, and shaking off the shackles of vulgar prejudice and bigotry, plunge themselves into scepticism, are generally, of all men most liable to the charge of prejudice and bigotry. For what is the free-thinking of which they boast, but a continual warfare against their noblest faculties? Under pretence of emancipating the mind from the enslaving influence of vulgar error, they explode religion ; but, at the same time, subject themselves to the most ignominious servitude, imposed by an artificial tyrannical prejudice against nature, reason and common sense ; as if a man should resolve to put out both his eyes, and follow the direction of some blind guide, because the organs of sight, like reason, are a vulgar and common blessing, enjoyed equally by all classes of people. Such free-thinkers, in order to avoid the imputation of foolish credulity, among their unprincipled associates, seem determined, in opposition to the clearest perceptions of reason, to believe every thing to be uncertain, that can be said respecting right and wrong, duty and obligation, and to commence bigots in scepticism. For if bigotry consisteth in a man's obstinate adherence to his own opinions, bigots may be found among those, who glory in the title of free-thinkers, and boast of the
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most extensive liberality of sentiment; there being many, who answer this description, as inflexibly attached to their own licentious notions and principles, as ever any ill-natured mistaken zealot, was, to his own superstition. And if ridicule were a good test of truth, or proper weapon for defending the cause of piety and virtue, it would be easy to retort upon such men, the sneers and sarcasms, which they throw out against religion, as if it's votaries were visionary superstitious enthusiasts, actuated by a deluded imagination, easy credulity, and vulgar error.

It is probable, my hearers, that in the circle of your acquaintance, you will often meet with those, whose conduct being such as must give them an alarming prospect into futurity, if religion be a reality, will endeavour to disparage it as a meer superstitious delusion, or fiction of human contrivance, calculated to amuse and captivate the ignorant and enthusiastic, but by no means suitable for men of taste and refinement, or of inquisitive and philosophic minds. But whatever such libertines may pretend, if what has been discoursed this day, be conformable to truth and reality, there is nothing, which doth more ennoble, dignify and adorn human nature, or place it in a more honourable and amiable point of view, than religion imbibed into the heart, and displayed in a man's temper and conduct. Our observations on the common sense of mankind respecting the matter, will furnish full evidence, that, in their judgment, religion, when exemplified in real life, forms a most excellent character; a character, worthy of universal esteem, approbation and applause. Not only the friends of religion, but it's enemies, who constantly endeavour to depreciate and disparage it, are so captivated with it's charms, that
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they cannot but honour and venerate every one, who proves himself to be one of it's sincere and hearty votaries, by a steady conformity to it's principles and precepts. It is equally manifest, that they, who openly renounce the discipline of religion and transgress it's sacred laws, take a most effectual method to exclude themselves from the friendship and confidence of all around them. They cannot obtain praise even from persons like themselves, except perhaps from some interested relations and connections, or from a few worthless flatterers, whose adulation is hypocrisy, and their applause disgrace.

APPETITE and passion, the unrestrained indulgence whereof is the misery and ruin of the world, often unite to vilify religion, and, if possible, to obliterate from the mind every impression of her fair image, in order to clear the way for a licentious practice. But reason, when free from corrupt bias, always espouses religion's cause, and vindicates her from every foul aspersions, reprobating vice, her worthless rival, with the utmost detestation and abhorrence. Religion, as it teaches us to act with dignity and propriety, according to the rank we hold in the scale of beings, and in conformity to the law of our creation, is the surest way to procure a good reputation, and to obtain honour and glory in this world and the next.

To what has been said, I would add, that, as libertinism tends directly to introduce confusion, and banish peace and harmony from the world, so men of sceptical principles and licentious manners, whatever professions of regard they may make, for the
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interest and welfare of their fellow-creatures, are mischievous members of society ; because, by their bad example and false reasonings, they do what in them lies, to confound the distinction between right and wrong, to suppress a sense of duty and obligation, and, by destroying the only sure basis of mutual trust and confidence, to open a wide door for the introduction of universal alienation, discord and hostility. It is therefore obvious to remark, that when such men meet with caresses from better characters, and gain promotion to offices of honour and authority, it bodes ill to a community ; as they will thereby be encouraged and aided in their endeavours to abolish religion, and divest the mind of moral feeling ; wherein, should they succeed, according to their wishes, instead of procuring any advantage to themselves or benefit to society, they would do themselves an irreparable injury, and (as far as the sphere of their power extends) diffuse mischief and misery among mankind.

Your own reflections, my hearers, can easily improve these thoughts, and form them into a prevalent motive of religious and holy life ; especially if you consider them in connection with those superior motives taken from a future state of existence, which will naturally occur to your minds, when you carry your views forward beyond the bounds of time, and contemplate the natural consequences of your present conduct, in respect to your condition in the world of spirits, to which death will introduce us all, as soon as the drama of the present life shall be finished, and this sublunary scene be closed.

May the supreme, eternal, self-existent God, to whom we are indebted for our being and faculties, the source of all wisdom and inward illumination, irradiate our understandings more and more with the light of all important truth, and rouse all the active powers of our souls into such exercises, as shall afford us joy and give us a relish for existence, during our residence on earth, and best serve to prepare us for that supreme beatitude, in the regions of immortality, for which our natures were originally framed and constituted.

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your own mind, and prove these things to be true motives of action. You consider them as motives taken from a false state of existence, which will naturally occur to your minds, when you carry your views forward to the bounds of time, and contemplate the natural consequences of your present conduct, in respect to your condition in the world of spirits, to which death will introduce us as soon as the terms of the present life shall be fulfilled, and this solemnity tends to enlighten

